

## CHAPTER TWO

# Hunter Responsibility

### *The Responsible Hunter*

## Introduction

What is the biggest threat to hunting in North America? If you guessed anti-hunters, your guess is off target. The greatest threat to hunting in North America is the negative public image hunters create with poor behavior in the field.

## A. Why learn about hunter responsibility?

Surveys show that while the majority of people approve of hunting, they oppose certain types of hunting and certain hunter behaviors. In fact, society considers inappropriate behavior as the single worst thing about hunters and hunting. It takes only a few irresponsible hunters to ruin hunting's public image. Unsafe handling of firearms, not knowing or not following hunting laws, disrespecting the rights of others, abusing fair chase ethics, can quickly turn public sentiment against hunters.

Killing an animal is a serious action and how the public feels about that killing can affect the future of hunting in Montana.

But maintaining or creating public support for hunting is not the only reason we should be responsible hunters. Hunting responsibly improves the experience—both your own and that of other hunters. And hunting responsibly sends the right message to those who look up to us for guidance in how to act. Hunting has a long history; it is up to hunters to demonstrate those qualities that we hope to see passed along to future hunters.

**Decide to be a responsible hunter before you hunt! Be safe ... legal ... and responsible.**

## Learning Objectives

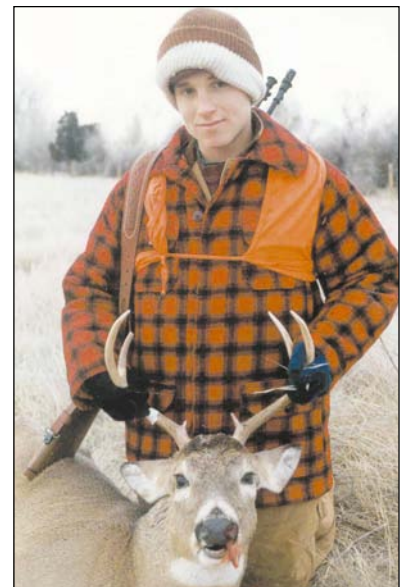
*At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:*

- Give three reasons why it is important to be a responsible hunter.
- List five qualities of a responsible hunter.
- Explain why laws are important tools for regulating hunting and managing wildlife.
- Define ethics, fair chase, and discuss the ethical problems in different hunting dilemmas.

## Key Words

Responsible  
Dilemma  
Legislators  
Bag limits  
Laws

Regulations  
Game warden  
Ethics  
Fair chase  
Poacher





**Wasn't the bison almost wiped out by hunters?** Market hunting (killing animals for the purpose of selling their hide, meat or parts) nearly exterminated the North American bison in the 1800s. Since there were few laws and no enforcement to protect wildlife, hunters killed as many animals as they could and did whatever they wanted with the carcasses.

At the turn of the century, concerned hunters, such as former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, banded together to form the Boone and Crockett Club. The Club worked with other organizations and citizens to pass legislation to protect wildlife for future generations. Thanks to the efforts of these early conservationists, once-rare species like white-tailed deer, elk, pronghorn, wood ducks and wild turkeys are now thriving and abundant enough for us to hunt and enjoy once again.

## B. What makes a hunter responsible?

The answer to this question is not simple. Is a **responsible** hunter someone who is a good shot? Is it someone who knows where to find wildlife? Is it someone who teaches others to hunt responsibly? Or, perhaps the responsible hunter is someone who follows laws and regulations.

These are all essential qualities of a responsible hunter, but other things are important as well. For example, a responsible hunter:

- 🦌 **Cares for wildlife** and demonstrates this by respecting hunting seasons, by not abusing the land when out in the field and by reporting poachers.
- 🦌 **Ensures the safety of people** by wearing hunter orange, respecting shooting hours and always clearly and definitely identifying the target before aiming a firearm or squeezing the trigger.
- 🦌 **Encourages and practices a fair chase ethic** by obeying equipment limitations and refusing to shoot an animal from a vehicle.
- 🦌 **Provides and protects opportunities for all people to enjoy wildlife** by supporting conservation efforts and by respecting others' rights and interests.
- 🦌 **Takes full responsibility for his or her actions** by admitting and taking steps to correct mistakes, taking the initiative to learn all applicable rules and regulations, and by allowing his or her actions to be judged by others and accepting either reward or punishment.

As you can see, there is more to being a responsible hunter than just behaving well in the field, mastering outdoor skills, achieving good marksmanship, or practicing safety. Being a responsible hunter means being a responsible citizen.

## C. What are laws and regulations?

Look at Montana's book of hunting regulations. Why do we have so many rules? Are they really necessary? Who makes them? Who enforces them?

### Who makes laws and regulations?

Hunting laws are created with the leadership of hunter-citizens working with **legislators** or elected officials who are responsible for making new laws. They are intended to protect and manage wildlife populations as well as to protect hunters. Before the establishment of these laws, many species were driven to extinction or near to it. In response, hunters encouraged legislators to pass laws to regulate hunting and protect species in hopes they could recover their numbers and be enjoyed by future generations of hunters and nonhunters.

Early laws established basic codes of conduct, hunting seasons, and **bag limits** (number of animals a hunter can legally take). Today's laws and regulations are more complex, but they continue the commitment to protect wildlife and habitat, as well as to protect the lives and safety of hunters.

**Laws** come from legislators or citizen ballot initiatives. It takes time and effort to develop laws, so they don't change very often. Because of this, most states and provinces grant state wildlife agencies authority to make **regulations**. Regulations are based on public input and on information provided by scientists and managers. They are easier to change than laws and are better suited to the way that wildlife is managed everyday.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is responsible for setting and enforcing hunting regulations for the state of Montana.

### Who enforces the law?

You may have already met a **game warden**. The job of the warden is to make sure hunters follow the laws and regulations. A warden may ask to see your license or ask questions about when and where you have hunted. He or she may also ask to inspect any animal you have killed. Cooperate — it's the right thing to do and it's the law!

### Know the law and obey it!

One of the qualities of a responsible hunter is that he or she knows and understands the laws that apply to his or her hunting situation. But it is not enough to know the law, you must also obey it!

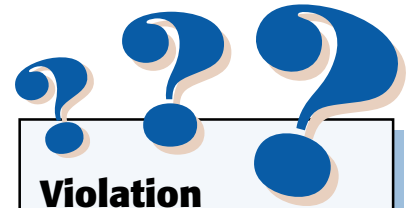
*Not knowing hunting laws is not an excuse for violating them. If you hunt, you must know the laws and respect them. Ignorance is not a defense!*

Keep these guidelines in mind:

-  Read and understand Montana's hunting regulations every year.

Locate each of the following topics in the regulations booklet, and write down the page number you found it on.

TOPIC	PAGE NUMBER
Purchasing licenses:	_____
Hunting seasons:	_____
Blaze orange requirements:	_____
Legal means and methods for taking game:	_____
Game tagging and transportation requirements:	_____
Trespassing laws and penalties:	_____
Special youth hunting regulations:	_____
Evidence of sex:	_____
Shooting hours:	_____



### Violation of Hunting Law Dilemma

A **dilemma** is a situation in which you have to choose between two unpleasant choices.

It was five days after the end of the deer hunting season and David was cutting firewood from a wood lot on his farm. While loading some logs on his wagon, he heard a rifle shot which sounded fairly close to him. He didn't pay too much attention since the neighbor boy does some target shooting about once every two weeks.

As David drove his tractor and wagon back to his house, he noticed his friend Bob's pickup truck at the far end of the farm. Bob was an avid hunter who thoroughly enjoyed deer hunting. After parking his load of firewood in his driveway, David walked back to Bob's truck.

Upon arrival, he found Bob dragging a field-dressed white-tailed doe out of the woods. Bob explained that he needed some meat for the table as he has been laid off from work for over a year. His last unemployment check had arrived about five weeks ago.




When David returned to his house, he found the local game warden in his driveway inquiring about purchasing some firewood.

**What should David do?**

### Hunting: Is it a right or a privilege?



Some people believe hunting is a right similar to freedom of speech and freedom of religion. But it isn't. Hunting is a privilege—one that can be taken away if you fail to meet certain standards. A right cannot be taken away; a privilege can.

For example, if you don't do your homework, your parents may take away your "television privileges." You may drive a car, but your license can be taken away if you drive irresponsibly or recklessly. Similarly, if you disobey hunting laws, your privilege to hunt may be taken away. Behaving irresponsibly and illegally can jeopardize all hunters' privileges to hunt.

-  Always carry a copy of the hunting regulations in the field.
-  Don't rely on others to tell you what is legal and right.
-  Make sure you have the correct licenses, permits, stamps and tags before you go hunting.

### D. What are ethics?

In addition to following the law, the responsible hunter develops and follows a personal code of ethics. **Ethics** are the rules for right and wrong, good and bad that societies and individuals develop. These rules help us to know how we should act in certain situations.

-  A person with good ethics is somebody who understands right and wrong, and chooses to do right in any given situation.
-  A person with good hunting ethics is one who will not do anything in the field he or she knows or feels is wrong, even if it is legal.

**Fair chase.** Hunters are encouraged to develop their own ethic of fair chase. **Fair chase** means balancing the skills and equipment of the hunter with the abilities of the animal to escape. Responsible hunters do not take unfair advantage of game animals, even if it's legal.

But how do we *know* what's right and what's wrong? All responsible hunters obey hunting laws but sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where the law doesn't tell us what to do. Unfortunately, there is not a "list" of ethical rules to help. In these cases, you must decide for yourself based on your personal sense of what is right and wrong.

In many hunting situations, there are no witnesses in the field to judge your actions. You are your only judge and jury. What would you do in the following situation?

**What would you do?** You and a friend are hunting ducks on the river. The daily limit is three ducks per hunter. Your friend has bagged his three ducks and stopped hunting. You've shot two ducks and decide to try for one more. Your friend comes along. A mallard flushes from the river in perfect shooting distance. You shoot and see the duck fall. But it lands in the river and is quickly swept downstream and out of sight. You both search for the duck, but can't find it. Your friend says to forget about it, there are plenty of ducks, and one more or less doesn't make a difference. You'll be sure to find another one to shoot. You probably feel bad that you couldn't find the dead duck. But you know that the three-a-day limit counts only for ducks that you claim and bring home. Legally, you can continue to hunt for another duck. But you know that you have already killed three ducks. What do you do? Do you continue to hunt? Or do you stop for the day? Your decision will be based on your personal set of ethics. Write down what you would do and why.



Ethical decisions are not always easy to make. When you get stuck, try this technique. Think about the qualities you look for in a friend.

- 🦋 You make friends with people you are comfortable being around.
  - 🦋 You make friends with people who agree with you on many subjects.
  - 🦋 And, you make friends with people you respect.
- Making an ethical decision can be like choosing a friend.
- 🦋 If you are comfortable with your decision, it is probably the right one.
  - 🦋 If you would agree with someone else who made the same decision, it is probably the right one.
  - 🦋 If you respect yourself for making that decision, it is probably the right one.
  - 🦋 And, if others respect you, you probably made the right decision.

*If you doubt your decision at any point, don't do it!*

Do we have enough information now to answer the question we started with—What makes a hunter responsible? Let's list what we have learned. A responsible hunter:

- 🦋 Knows and obeys laws and regulations.
- 🦋 Views hunting as more than killing an animal.
- 🦋 Develops a personal code of ethics and sticks to it.
- 🦋 Takes full responsibility for his or her actions.
- 🦋 Respects people, the land and wildlife.

Remember: Everything you do while hunting has consequences. Every person you talk to, every fence you cross and every shot you take matters. Be responsible, no matter who is watching! Be responsible and respectful even when no one is watching!



**What can I do when I see someone breaking the law or behaving unethically?**



People who kill animals out of season, who hunt without a license, or who hunt after legal shooting hours are called **poachers**.

Please report any poachers or any suspicious hunting activity by calling Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' toll free phone number 24 hours per day.

**POACHERS ARE CRIMINALS  
REPORT VIOLATORS**

**1-800-TIP-MONT or 1-800-847-6668**

## A Hunter's Code\*

1. I pledge to learn and follow the rules of firearm and hunting safety. I will require the same of my hunting partners.
2. I pledge to obey all hunting regulations. I will conduct myself in an ethical, sportsmanlike manner. I will require the same of my hunting partners.
3. I pledge to respect the activities and beliefs of other hunters and nonhunters.
4. If I see a game law violation or vandalism, I pledge to report it to wildlife authorities immediately.
5. I pledge to ask the landowner's permission to hunt. I will share any game I bag with my host.
6. I pledge to hunt under the rules of "fair chase." I will not take unfair advantage of game species.
7. I pledge to improve my hunting and marksmanship skills. I will take only those shots which permit a clean kill.
8. I pledge to support wildlife conservation programs. I will help restore habitat and wildlife so future sportsmen and sportswomen will have a fulfilling outdoor experience.
9. I will teach others the skills, techniques, rules and ethics of a true sportsperson.
10. I pledge to make full use of any game I bag. I will prevent its waste.

*\*This code is compiled from several sources including the NRA and the Kansas Hunter Education Manual*

## Chapter Two Quiz

1. We have hunting laws to protect: (Mark the correct answers.)  
☐ wildlife  
☐ people  
☐ land and habitat
  
2. Hunting is a right, not a privilege. (Mark the correct answer.)  
☐ true  
☐ false
  
3. Hunters can help maintain a positive public image by: (Mark the correct answers.)  
☐ helping other people enjoy wildlife and hunting  
☐ wearing bloody hunting clothing to town  
☐ bragging in public about how many animals they kill  
☐ respecting the needs and wishes of other people
  
4. When is it okay to be irresponsible? (Mark the correct answer.)  
☐ when you are in a wilderness area  
☐ when nobody else can see you  
☐ when your behavior doesn't hurt anyone  
☐ never
  
5. A fair chase ethic includes actions and an attitude that show: (Mark the correct answer.)  
☐ an interest in killing as many animals as possible  
☐ respect for wildlife  
☐ a desire to break the law
  
6. Just because something is legal does not automatically mean it is fair or responsible. (Mark the correct answer.)  
☐ true  
☐ false

7. Whose responsibility is it to know the laws and regulations before you go hunting?  
(Mark the correct answer.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ yours
- \_\_\_\_\_ your parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ the leader of your hunting group
8. A responsible hunter follows the law and takes \_\_\_\_\_  
for his or her actions. (Fill in the blank with the correct answer.)
9. The job of the game warden is to: (Mark the correct answers.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ collect money from hunters after issuing tickets
- \_\_\_\_\_ tell you where to find deer and elk to shoot
- \_\_\_\_\_ make sure that all hunting laws and regulations are followed
- \_\_\_\_\_ make you stop at game check stations

